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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 THE HAGUE 001976

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [MAAR](#) [ISAF](#) [NATO](#) [AF](#) [NL](#)
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR EUR PDAS VOLKER'S VISIT TO THE
NETHERLANDS

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Classified By: Ambassador Roland Arnall; reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

PDAS Volker:

11. (C) My staff and I warmly welcome you to The Hague. Our Dutch MFA hosts are looking forward to consulting on a wide range of issues, including the Riga Summit, Uruzgan, Lebanon, OSCE reform (and the Kazakh presidency bid), the Arms Trade Treaty, and detainee policy. You will also have excellent opportunities to engage with Parliamentarians, opinion makers and the press during your visit. Your speech to the Netherlands Atlantic Commission and your press availability will be excellent opportunities to define the U.S. agenda and to reinforce in sometimes doubting minds the importance we continue to place on solid trans-Atlantic relations. The recent revelations about secret prisons have raised painful questions about trust and transparency between allies; putting this behind us will take hard work, but your visit will help begin this process.

ELECTION POLITICS:

12. (C) This is an election year, with all that that entails. The governing center-right coalition of Christian Democrats (CDA) and Liberals (VVD) face tough opposition from the center-left Labor Party (PvdA), but the results are far from certain. At the moment, the PvdA -- led by the charismatic Wouter Bos -- have a 5-10 point lead in the polls over the next largest party (CDA), but a strong economy appears to be shifting support back to Prime Minister Balkenende and his political allies, the VVD. No single party has enough support to win a majority, which ensures that the next government -- like all Dutch governments -- will be a coalition. If CDA and VVD together win a majority, they could exclude PvdA from the next government, even if PvdA emerges as the largest party in Parliament. Alternatively, PvdA may seek to form a coalition with either the CDA or VVD -- in either case, moderating the PvdA's more Euro-centric approach to foreign policy. There is a remote chance that left-leaning parties -- PvdA, the Socialist Party (S/P), and GreenLeft (GL) -- could form a majority in Parliament, but long-standing differences between the parties would make the formation of a stable government extremely unlikely. If no natural majority emerges from the November 22 elections a few small parties -- such as the Protestant Christian Union (CU) -- could become kingmakers. You will meet PvdA foreign policy spokesman, MP Bert Koenders and his VVD counterpart,

MP Hans van Baalen, Tuesday afternoon. Either man stands a good chance of being a minister in the next government, should his party be included.

NATO:

13. (C) The good news is that nearly every possible government coalition will be supportive of continued collaboration with the U.S. within existing frameworks, such as NATO, despite controversial issues such as detainee policy and trade talks.

This reflects the deep transatlantic orientation pervading Dutch political culture. Only a few weeks ago, the formerly Maoist Socialist Party (SP) formally renounced its decades-long opposition to Dutch NATO membership in a blatant effort to present itself as a "credible" coalition partner for the PvdA. The PvdA, meanwhile, has been careful to draw a distinction between its opposition to many U.S. policies from its long-standing support for NATO; the PvdA, for example, opposed the deployment of 600 Dutch Special Forces to Afghanistan under OEF, but unanimously supported the deployment of 1,400 troops to Uruzgan as part of the ISAF mission.

14. (C) Regardless of the outcome of the November 22 elections, Prime Minister Balkenende will come to Riga in a caretaker capacity -- forming a new Dutch government generally takes between three and six months -- and with his mind firmly focused on domestic politics. Fortunately, the issues currently on the table for Riga are not likely to be contentious domestically or create divisions between us and the Dutch. In recent weeks, the Dutch have dropped their opposition to granting Intensified Dialogue to Georgia and signed a Letter of Intent committing 500 hours worth of funding to the C-17 project for FY07. On other issues -- NRF, Global Partnership, NTM-I, etc. -- the Dutch generally

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support our objectives and share our frustration over the unwillingness of other partners to move forward quickly or to deploy resources. Over the long term, the Dutch are cautious about enlargement/expansion prospects and hope to engage in a "comprehensive" dialogue on the NATO's identity and future roles before extending new invitations -- a position determined as much by domestic skepticism about the EU's rapid expansion as by any NATO-specific concerns. No doubt your interlocutors will look to you for clues regarding our long-term thinking about NATO to help formulate their positions for Riga and beyond.

Afghanistan/Detainees:

15. (C) The bad news is that detainee policy, in particular, has soured the mood among the Dutch public and may reopen the debate on Dutch involvement in Afghanistan. Dutch politicians, with the exception of Foreign Minister Bot, have generally not shown the desire to defend the U.S.-Dutch relationship publicly, and all too many have jumped on the bandwagon and heaped criticism at us. Your press availability and your Q&A will undoubtedly give you an opportunity to vigorously defend the U.S. commitment to human rights. You should also stress the importance we attach to the advice of European countries in finding practical solutions to the difficult problems these detainees have posed. FM Bot has said his Government wants to help us find solutions, and we welcome this.

16. (C) Having supported the Uruzgan mission, albeit with reservations, the PvdA leadership stands as much to lose as anyone from reopening the deployment decision as a campaign issue. That said, public support for the mission remains weak -- a recent poll indicates that 57 percent of the population is opposed -- and all parties remain sensitive to the potential impact of events on the ground on the electorate. So far, the Dutch have been lucky not to have

lost any personnel as the direct result of combat, but a dramatic increase in Dutch casualties, problems with detainees, or clear indications that "reconstruction" projects in Uruzgan will not be possible during the Dutch deployment could all increase public dissatisfaction with the mission while pushing the three largest parties into contrary positions. At the same time, smaller parties such as the Progressive Liberals (D-66), Green Left, and the Socialists, will continue to exploit public concerns about the mission to steal votes from the larger parties.

LEBANON AND THE MID-EAST

17. (C) FM Bot has been a staunch public supporter of Israel's right to defend itself and has, in fact, taken significant criticism in doing so. He has been pushing within the GONL for the Dutch to find a way to contribute to the UNIFIL mission, and the GONL is now considering contributing a frigate in conjunction with the Germans. The Dutch are also emerging as a key donor to the reconstruction process; as FM Bot recently told Ambassador Arnall, the Dutch "not only make pledges, but also pay up." On Iran, the Dutch are standing firm -- at least compared to many other EU partners -- in insisting on Iranian compliance with UNSC directives, but are disappointed that the EU-3 process has left them out of the loop.

OSCE

18. (C) The Dutch believe our insistence on opposing the Kazakh bid for the OSCE presidency is counter-productive - or at least not sufficiently subtle. MFA officials will be prepared to discuss this, as well broader issues of OSCE reform, in your meetings.

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